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29 April 1959

MEMORANDUM FOR: Division and Branch Chiefs

SUBJECT: Responsibility of ORR Analysts in Writing
Reports and Papers

1. Some analysts have relied too heavily on the Publications Staff for putting their reports and papers into fully intelligible and acceptable form. These analysts, in effect, expect the Publications Staff to assume part of their own responsibilities for preparing carefully worded papers which effectively present their analyses and conclusions and are consistent, intelligible, and not subject to misinterpretation. Facts alone are not enough. Submission of well-written reports would permit the Publications Staff to concentrate more on organization, presentation, logic, and balance, with consequently less attention to the sheer necessity of putting the report into acceptable language. The result would be both to improve the quality of ORR reports and to reduce the time required for the editorial process.

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2. In 1947, this lack of appreciation by some analysts of their responsibility for good, clear, and careful writing so concerned [redacted] now a member of the Board of National Estimates, that he submitted a memorandum on the subject. The following excerpts are from that memorandum.

"Consider the argument that the authority of the [Publications] Staff should be 'editorial' only, that of the Branches only 'substantive.' ... Does it mean that the Branches, while exercising exclusive 'substantive' authority, have no responsibility to produce intelligible copy? How are the Branches to express 'substantive' judgment without the intelligible use of language? If they consider their 'substantive' responsibility discharged in producing drafts so obscure that extensive 'editorial' revision is necessary, they run grave risk of 'substantive' alteration of their copy in the course of the 'editorial' process. Obviously it behooves the Branches to produce copy as clear, concise, and meaningful as they are able to make it, from an 'editorial' as well as a 'substantive' point of view.

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"The...Staff...recognizes...both 'editorial' and 'substantive' responsibility in the Branches. It has no use for incoherent copy, however important its conjectural substance. It must rely upon the Branches to be better informed than it is with respect to particular situations, inasmuch as (a) Branch personnel are selected as specialists in their particular fields, and (b) their responsibilities are limited to those fields and they can obviously cover them much more closely than can personnel having generalized responsibilities.

"The Branches must recognize equally that the personnel of the...Staff [are] ...not limited to the transposition of phrases or the insertion of commas.... [The Staff's function is] to exercise judgment as to pertinence, logic in presentation, completeness of coverage, coherence, and intelligibility...."

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3. In 1952, men responsible for putting together the Report" had their problems as well. I quote from certain exchanges of memoranda between them.

"Intra-professional talk is closed-circuit talk; it can alter little and stimulate little ... to me, writing across the other fellow's thresholds is the first rule by which we should be guided.

"I am not on the side of the man who says 'I want all this stuff boiled down to two pages, get me?' This is impossible. Persuasive lucidity in the midst of the difficult and complex facts is very hard to achieve, but it is not impossible, given enough attention to communication between mind and mind ..."

4. Many of our analysts are fully aware of their responsibilities in this context, but others may find reason to reconsider their standards for writing reports in ORR.

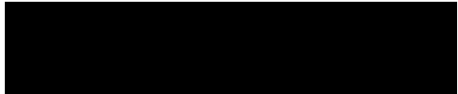
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5. When you, as the reviewers of reports prepared within your components, find that an analyst has clearly misunderstood his responsibility for good writing or has failed to communicate his findings effectively, I suggest that the substance of this memorandum be brought to his attention at the time his report is returned for revision.

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Research and Reports

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